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GERMANY: Dynamite

In Berlin, jittery with continued crisis, opened last week the sedition trial of Rev. Martin Niemöller, who during the War served Kaiser Wilhelm II as one of the most indomitable, hellraising U-boat commanders ever to spread high-powered "frightfulness" for the Fatherland.

In 1916, young Lieutenant Niemöller set off on the ramshackle U-73 told to do as much damage to Allied shipping as he could with the old hulk. He promptly hoisted the French flag and under these false colors sailed boldly past the British war boats guarding Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. There, still flying the French flag whenever it suited his purposes. Lieutenant Niemöller became "The Scourge of Malta," daringly sank two troopships and a British man-of-war, even laid German mines in the very harbor of Valletta.

The delighted Imperial German Government soon transferred Hero Niemöller to the larger, modern U-151 and this submarine on a single marauding 114-day voyage hung up a record of 55,000 tons of Allied shipping *gesunken*. Commander Niemöller was next given the UC-67 with which he stole about outside Marseille, managed to sink so many French ships that the port was ordered temporarily closed. So many Allied sub-chasers were then assigned to get the UC-67? that even Daredevil Niemöller saw the game was up, cleared out.

Inflation of the German mark after the War ruined a rich uncle who had offered to set up Martin Niemöller as a farmer in Tecklenburg. He turned to the relative financial security of Germany's State-supported Lutheran Church, became a pastor in 1924. Ten years later Pastor Niemöller, who threw into saving German souls the same brawling vigor that stood him in good stead

sinking ships, had corralled Berlin's wealthiest and most influential congregation for his Jesus Christus Kirche in the swank suburb Dahlem. Such redoubtable parishioners as Dr. Horace Greeley Hjalmar Schacht, autocratic Reichsbank Governor, immensely liked the two-fisted sermons Pastor Niemoller preached.

When he first heard of the Nazi movement Dr. Niemoller supported it with such enthusiasm that he is believed by many Germans to have been for a time an enrolled member of the Nazi Party. When, however, he saw that Adolf Hitler intended to dominate the Church, Pastor Niemoller began preaching about the Nazis very much as though they were ships he wanted to torpedo. As he had fought for the Kaiser, he now fought for the Church, and in Berlin most churchmen agree today that but for Niemoller most of the opposition to Hitler within the Lutheran fold would probably have been beaten down. Seven months ago the Gestapo (Secret Police), who had searched Pastor Niemoller's home repeatedly, finally clapped him into Moabit Prison on the triply seditious charge of "misuse of the pulpit to vilify the State and the Party and attack the authority of the Government." The longer he has languished in jail the more of a Church hero indomitable Martin Niemoller has become, and as his trial began last week he had potent friends in many lands. At the opening of the spring Assembly of the Church of England last week the Archbishop of York prayed: "Let us remember in silent prayer the trial of Dr. Niemoller."

Why Am I Here? The State obviously feared last week that Christians of every stamp would be unfavorably impressed by what was sure to be said at the trial of Martin Niemoller. His seven children, as they crowded forward with their mother for the first glimpse they had had in seven months of Dr. Niemoller, were a pathetic sight to touch all hearts.

At red-haired Nazi Prosecutor Thissen, the prisoner-pastor at once shouted accusingly: "Why am I here under the accusation of a traitor? I have done nothing to justify such a charge!"

"You will find that out later," retorted the worried prosecutor.

Began embarrassed proceedings in which the prosecutor successively persuaded the court either to exclude altogether or swear to secrecy almost everyone who was likely to have anything to do with the trial. Application for spectators' seats by a group of English clergymen who had arrived headed by the Bishop of Chichester was promptly rejected. Soon even Dr. Niemoller's three lawyers had been sworn not to say a word about the trial to anyone outside the court. Meanwhile, the whole German press obediently printed not a line in which the German people

could read anything about the trial or even that it was taking place. After the first few days, Berlin representatives of the comparatively privileged foreign press had extreme difficulty gleaning what was going on in court. Secret police swarmed in the corridors, ostentatiously eavesdropped whenever a correspondent was seen in conversation with anyone, even another correspondent.

Apparently Dr. Niemoller from the first staked everything on repeated and increasingly impassioned demands that Presiding Judge Hoepke make this a public trial. The prisoner's lawyers, who for the sake of their own careers at the German bar could not keep on making such demands indefinitely, finally were shoved into the background by Pastor Niemoller who reputedly shouted: "In religious matters I know more than the three of them put together!"

During his seven months in jail Dr. Niemoller had access to theological and legal tomes, brought to his trial twelve thick volumes of notes and defense arguments he had prepared. On the first two days 42 witnesses were called, and reputedly in Berlin there are almost an indefinite number of pious Germans, wealthy folk or members of the fighting services, ready to testify that Martin Niemoller is no traitor but a hero of the Fatherland and a martyr of the Church. If he wins acquittal it will be by the 'same indomitable, single-handed fighting methods that caused the German Supreme Court to acquit the famed Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitroff of complicity in the Reichstag fire (TIME, March 6, 1933, et seq.), send him to Moscow where he was acclaimed and made by Dictator Stalin the head of the Communist International.

Niemoller on Nazis. Whether or not it was "treason" for Pastor Niemoller to preach, write and talk as he has against the Nazi system, his published sermons* are undoubtedly among the most controversial ever preached. In Germany the Nazis claim to object only to what they call "Negative Christianity," claim to approve "Positive Christianity" (TIME, Aug. 10, 1936). Pastor Niemoller, in perhaps his most controversial sermon, boldly accused the Nazis of taking in this matter today exactly the line the Jews took when Christ was alive.

"I cannot help saying quite harshly and bluntly that the Jewish people came to grief and disgrace because of its Positive Christianity!" thundered Martin Niemoller from his pulpit on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity last year. "It [the Jewish people] bears a curse throughout the history of the world because it was ready to approve of its Messiah just as long and as far as it thought it could gain some advantage for its own plans and its own aims from Him, His words and His deeds. It bears a curse because it rejected Him and resisted Him to the death when it became clear that Jesus of Nazareth would not cease calling [the Jews] to repentance and faith, despite

their insistence that they were free, strong and proud men and belonged to a pureblooded, race-conscious nation!"

Nobody in the congregation, least of all members of the Secret Police, failed to catch Pastor Niemoller's high-powered implication that the Nazis are proud, race-conscious exponents of pure blood and in these respects resemble Jews. No more provocative suggestions could have been made in Germany, but Pastor Niemoller continued his sermon by shouting: "Positive Christianity, which the Jewish people wanted, clashed with Negative Christianity as Jesus himself represented it! . . . Friends, can we risk going with our nation without forgiveness of sins, without that so-called Negative Christianity which, when all is said and done, clings in repentance and faith to Jesus as the Savior of sinners? I cannot and you cannot and OUR NATION CANNOT! 'Come, let us return unto the Lord!' "

Such sermons as this Pastor Niemoller preached Sunday after Sunday to Berlin's most fashionable congregation, and the fact that they stood and still stand by him is proof of how little liking German aristocrats have for the whole Nazi claptrap of neopaganism and "pure race." The issue of the Jews is a separate issue, and neither the Dahlem aristocrats nor their pastor have shown themselves pro-Semitic, if anything the reverse. In the fiery prisoner-pastor's words: "Dear brethren, the reason is easily given: the Jews brought the Christ of God to the Cross."

Thus in Germany today Niemoller equals Dynamite, his trial this week contributes mightily to the stresses & strains of the crisis faced by Adolf Hitler.

* HERE STAND I!, Willett, Clark & Co. (\$2).

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